

BA-47

## Come By Chance

### **Architectural Survey File**

This is the architectural survey file for this MIHP record. The survey file is organized reverse-chronological (that is, with the latest material on top). It contains all MIHP inventory forms, National Register nomination forms, determinations of eligibility (DOE) forms, and accompanying documentation such as photographs and maps.

Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site ([mht.maryland.gov](http://mht.maryland.gov)) for details about how to make an appointment.

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***Last Updated: 06-23-2004***

c. 1860

BA 47  
Come By Chance  
John M. Nelson, III  
Green Spring Valley Road  
Stevenson, Md. 21153  
private

The land surrounding Come By Chance was owned in 1744 by Samuel Owings. Recent architectural discoveries (or examination) suggest that the fragments of 18th century walls incorporated into the present structure may have been part of the house which Dr. Owings built on the property. An early springhouse remains on the place.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

BA 47  
x-876.630  
y-575.140

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

MAGI # 0300472535

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

COME BY CHANCE  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Green Spring Valley Road

CITY, TOWN

Stevenson

STATE

Maryland

Second

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Park Heights and Valley Rds.

VICINITY OF

COUNTY

Baltimore

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

☐ DISTRICT  
☒ BUILDING(S)  
☐ STRUCTURE  
☐ SITE  
☐ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

☐ PUBLIC  
☒ PRIVATE  
☐ BOTH  
**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**  
☐ IN PROCESS  
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

☒ OCCUPIED  
☐ UNOCCUPIED  
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS  
**ACCESSIBLE**  
☐ YES RESTRICTED  
☐ YES UNRESTRICTED  
☒ NO

**PRESENT USE**

☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM  
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK  
☐ EDUCATIONAL ☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS  
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC  
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION  
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

John M. Nelson III

Telephone #: 486-6937

STREET & NUMBER

Green Spring Valley Road

CITY, TOWN

Stevenson

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland 21153

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Baltimore  
County Courts Building

STREET & NUMBER

401 Bosley Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Towson

STATE

Maryland 21204

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**7 DESCRIPTION**

BA-47

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE _____

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

COME BY CHANCE is a two storey brick house which appears at first glance to date from ca. 1860-1875; two fragments of earlier Flemish bond brickwork visible externally and a smaller cellar beneath the front or easterly section with a corner chimney foundation unrelated to the present chimneys above indicate that scant fragments of earlier eighteenth century walls were incorporated in the present construction. While the dimensions of the earliest house are obscured by the later construction they do appear close to the one storey brick dwelling 16 x 36 feet recorded for this property in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax.

The Flemish bond brickwork is visually similar to that of nearby St. Thomas' Church and Sater's Church, both eighteenth century structures.

The earliest construction visible is at the northwest corner and west side (near the southwest corner) of the front section of the present house. The bricks are laid in Flemish bond with an extensive use of black or glazed headers. A later door is cut through the original north wall and an original window opening immediately east of the door is filled with brick. Portions of the arch remain, five courses in height, segmentally arched with a flat top. Queen closers are at the original masonry opening and northwest corner. The original brickwork is but one storey in height. The cellar beneath the front or easterly section of the present house is shorter (in the north-south dimension) than the present house above and in the northwest corner the stone walls corbel out above the floor to support a former corner chimney and fireplace which once rose within the northwest corner of the original house. The cellar beneath the west wing may predate the present house, that is it may relate to an early addition to the original house, but proof is indeterminable.

The principal or east front of the present house is three bays in length, two storeys in height, of brick laid in common bond without headers. Other walls have headers every eighth course. A small gable rises above the middle bay and the wide eave and rake cornices are supported by broad but shallow paneled modillions. The single chimneys which rise flush with each end gable are reduced slightly immediately above the roof and a tall narrow panel in each wider face suggests the separate flues of these chimneys' late medieval or Tudor precedents.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

A semi-circular window is in the small east gable and similar windows flank the chimney of the south gable. Typical windows elsewhere are tall 6/6 with narrow frames and louvred blinds; such windows flank the chimneys in each end, each storey. The principal entrance is embellished with a pedimented surround, an early twentieth century Georgian addition. The northwest door, previously described as interrupting the eighteenth century brick-work, is sheltered by a pedimented hood supported on carved consoles, also an early twentieth century addition in the Georgian style.

A long two storey wing extends to the rear or west, on its south side sheltered by two storeys of porches. A wide bay window relieves its north side. At the extreme west end is a short service wing perpendicular to the west wing.

Within the front or easterly section is a central hall containing the principal stair and a single room on either side. A large dining room is the first room of the west wing, the bay window on its north side; a large twentieth century sun porch fills much of the angle between the front section and the dining room; kitchens, service and servants rooms are beyond the dining room. The entire interior is a distinguished rendition of English late Georgian design, added in the early twentieth century. Original doors remain in the second storey, having four unmoulded, partially raised panels, beaded architraves with simple wide backbands on the hall side, (originally) no backbands on the room side. The mantels in the chamber above the three principal rooms below are probably original to this house, consisting of plain pilasters supporting plain friezes and thick shelves. The floor framing, visible in the cellar, is all circular-sawn.

The roof framing is not exposed owing to its covering with modern drywall but three studs are exposed in the area between the front section and the west wing; they are eighteenth century materials, here used out-of-context, but undoubtedly from the original house, pit-sawn and with some hand-made wrought-iron nails remaining from their original use.

East of the house is a two storey stone spring house; the actual spring is in a small stone vault outside the southwest corner. Floor joists are of hewn material and the floor is secured with cut nails.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

COME BY CHANCE is a house dating from the third quarter of the nineteenth century which incorporates scant fragments of a smaller eighteenth century house and in which was superimposed (in the early twentieth century) a late eighteenth century English Georgian style interior. Of the many outbuildings once required to support rural life the early spring house remains.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

## COME BY CHANCE

The house Come By Chance takes its name from a charming Valley legend. One dark night some 160 years ago, a man named Richard Gist was riding through the Green Spring Valley when a storm forced him to seek shelter in a grove of trees. When he awoke in the morning, he discovered two natural springs on the property and a rise of ground well-suited for a home. Gist was said to be so taken with the area that he acquired the land, built a home, and named the place Come By Chance as he had literally come upon the property by accident.

While a delightful tale, there is no truth to this story. Yet it is an example of some of the Valley's folklore which continues to intrigue area residents. Today's Come By Chance, however, truly does bear the name of the tract on which it stands---originally a 50-acre patent surveyed in 1719/20 for a William Bennett. After changing hands several times, the land was purchased in 1744 by Samuel Owings. There are no land records showing ownership by Richard Gist or any member of his family.

Samuel Owings (of Green Spring Punch) retained this property, although he never lived there, until his death in 1775. By his will the land went to his bachelor son, Eale. When this Owings died in 1781, the land passed to one of his nephews, Dr. Thomas Pale Owings.

Recent architectural examination of Come By Chance uncovered a few remaining fragments of eighteenth-century walls incorporated into the present construction. Such a discovery gives credence to the belief that Dr. Owings was the builder of the original house. The 1798 Federal Tax Assessment does list this Owings as owning "one brick dwelling house, 1 story, 16 x 36 feet" on part of Come By Chance. The dimensions of the oldest section of the present house do appear close to those given on the tax list.

Dr. Thomas Owings sold his property and other surrounding land (some 215 acres) to Thornton and Rachel Poole who, on 15 September 1834, sold the lot to William C. Gent for \$3000.

It appears that William was responsible for the construction of the present house. He is listed in the 1850 U. S. Census as a 61-year-old farmer with Baltimore County real estate valued at \$35,000. In his household were his wife, and three children ages 21 to 24. At the time of his death in 1870, Gent was living on his Gunpowder Farm; possibly he moved there after the 1865 death of his wife. By the terms of his will, Come By Chance, which he called Green Spring Farm, went to his son Joshua.

Joshua and Hannah Gent were active in the Stone Chapel Methodist Church. The 1877 Atlas for Baltimore County lists him as a farmer owning 206 acres near Stevenson Station. On 4 February 1895 he conveyed Come By Chance to his daughter Florence. In 1900, one year before her father's death, Florence sold 19 acres and the house to Frank A. Bonsal.

The Bonsals lived at Come By Chance for nine years and they were responsible for some of the remodeling of the house which still exists today. Bonsal's wife was Ellinor Donnell Stewart, daughter of Charles M. Stewart. Her childhood days of growing up at Cliffholme in the Valley are recalled in her book Days Gone By.

The Bonsals sold their 22 acre estate to Edward M. and Elsie (McVitty)

McKeon in 1913.<sup>14</sup> McKeon owned Come By Chance twice: he sold the property in 1920 to George Ross Veazv, a prominent Paltimore attorney, only to repurchase it six years later.<sup>15</sup> McKeon's second wife, Mrs. Alice (Rush) Carter, sold the house in 1938 to the John Nelsons.<sup>16</sup>

During his two periods of ownership, McKeon made further additions and changes to Come By Chance, including a formal garden. He was the president of the Baltimore Belting Company and his wife Alice had a weekly radio program on war gardens during World War II.<sup>17</sup>

The Nelson family owned Come By Chance from 1938 until 1969 when ownership was transferred to their son John and his wife Virginia (Lovell).<sup>18</sup> They are the present owners.



**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Dawn F. Thomas and Robert W. Barnes; The Green Spring Valley, Its History and Heritage, 2 Vols. (Baltimore, Maryland Historical Society, 1978)  
Baltimore County Land Records, County Courts Bldg., Towson, Md.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 19.52

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

{ Northeast corner Valley and Park Heights Avenue.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	COUNTY
STATE	COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

James T. Wollon, Jr., A.I.A./Dawn F. Thomas, Research Historian 1-25-80

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Valleys Planning Council

828-7807

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

212 Washington Avenue

Maryland 21204

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.


RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust  
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438

## COME BY CHANCE

## FOOTNOTES

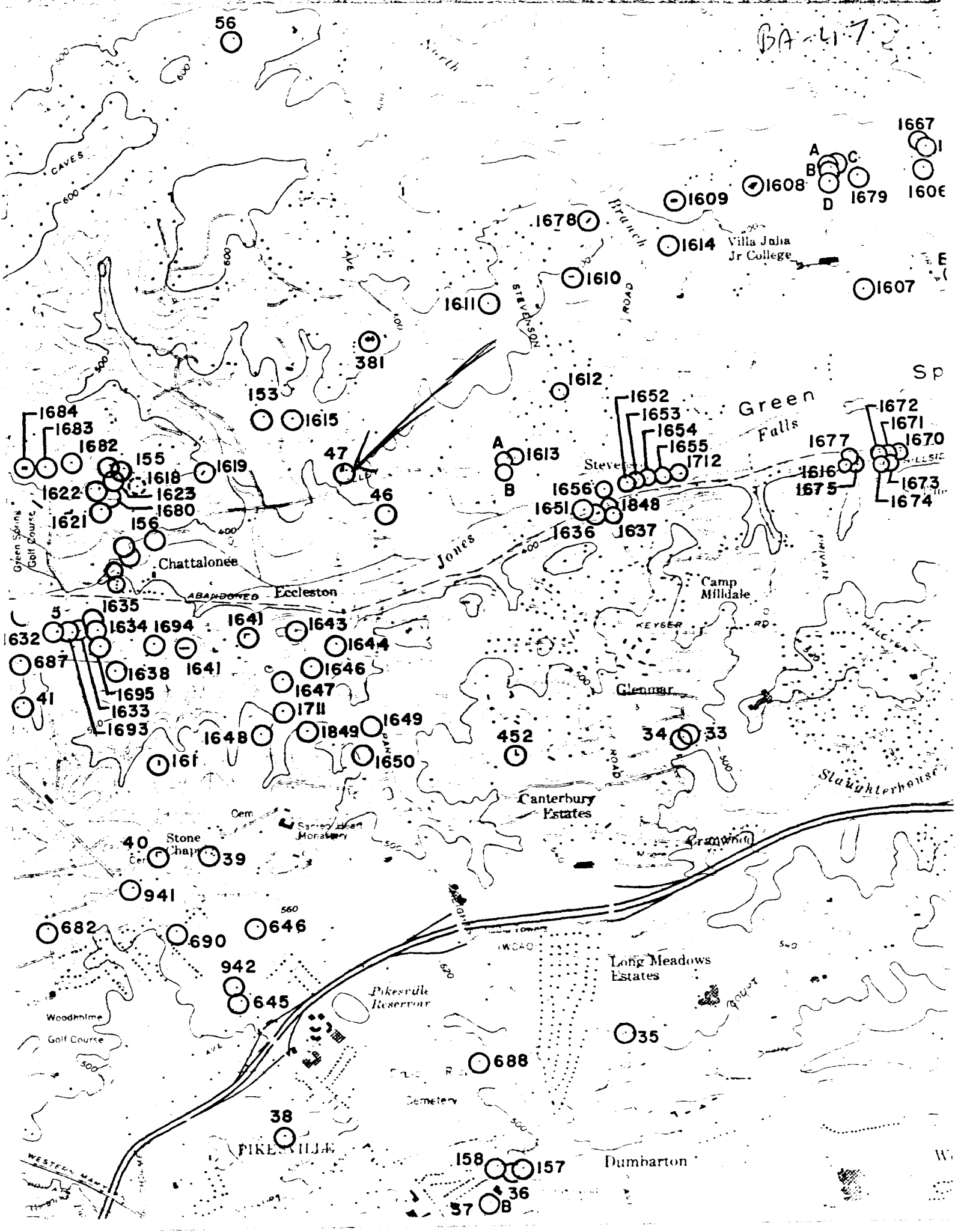
- <sup>1</sup> Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage Tour Book (Baltimore: Federated Garden Club of Maryland, 1968).
- <sup>2</sup> Patent Liber I. L. no. A, fol. 47, Hall of Records (HR), Annapolis, Maryland.
- <sup>3</sup> Baltimore County Land Records (BCLR), Libers I. S. no. I, fol. 44, and T. B. no. C, fol. 683, HR.
- <sup>4</sup> Maryland Will Book, Liber 40, fol. 392, HR.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Federal Tax Assessment Record for Back River Upper Hundred, Baltimore County, 1798, fol. 1072, Maryland Historical Society (MHS), Baltimore, Maryland.
- <sup>7</sup> BCLR, Liber 245, fol. HR.
- <sup>8</sup> United States Census for Baltimore County, District One, 1850, fol. 419, MHS.
- <sup>9</sup> Baltimore County Wills, Liber 3, fol. 458, Towson Court House, Towson, Maryland.
- <sup>10</sup> G. M. Hopkins, Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland. (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1977).
- <sup>11</sup> BCLR, Liber 208, fol. 333, 336, Towson.
- <sup>12</sup> BCLR, Liber N. B. M. no. 243, fol. 552, Towson.
- <sup>13</sup> Dielman File, MHS.
- <sup>14</sup> BCLR, Liber W. B. C. no. 408, fol. 251, Towson.
- <sup>15</sup> BCLR, Libers W. P. C. no. 545 fol. 306, and C. W. C. no. 650, fol. 595, Towson.
- <sup>16</sup> BCLR, Liber C. W. B., Jr., no. 1025, fol. 101, Towson.
- <sup>17</sup> Dielman File; Sun, 25 June 1935.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr. John N. Nelson, III, 24 October 1972; Telephone conversation with Mrs. John N. Nelson, III, 5 November 1974. BCLR Liber 2736 folio 532.

6300-75104-137

1. STATE <b>Maryland</b> COUNTY <b>Baltimore</b> TOWN STREET NO. <b>Hillside Road</b> VICINITY <b>Dist. III near Park Heights Avenue</b> ORIGINAL OWNER ORIGINAL USE PRESENT OWNER PRESENT USE WALL CONSTRUCTION NO. OF STORIES		HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY INVENTORY <b>BA-47</b>	
		2. NAME <b>Come By Chance</b> DATE OR PERIOD <b>about 1750</b> STYLE ARCHITECT BUILDER	
		3. FOR LIBRARY OF CONGRESS USE	
4. NOTABLE FEATURES, HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND DESCRIPTION <span style="float: right;">OPEN TO PUBLIC</span>  <p style="text-align: center;">Land purchased by Christopher Gist. Central portion of present brick house built by him.</p>			
5. PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRUCTURE <span style="float: right;">Endangered Interior Exterior</span>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;">          6. LOCATION MAP (Plan Optional)       </div> <div style="width: 45%;">         7. PHOTOGRAPH       </div> </div>			
8. PUBLISHED SOURCES (Author, Title, Pages) INTERVIEWS, RECORDS, PHOTOS, ETC.		9. NAME, ADDRESS AND TITLE OF RECORDER <b>(First HABS Report)</b> <b>E. Frances Offutt</b> <b>HABS COMMITTEE OF BALTIMORE</b> <b>COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY</b> DATE OF RECORD <b>July 29, 1965</b>	

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND PHOTOGRAPHS MAY BE ADDED ON SHEET OF SAME SIZE

BA-4172





BA 47

Come by Chance

GSVHD

Gr.Spr.Ve.Rd.

JTW L.E.

1/79

Md. Hist. Tr.

from SE

*Chance*

*253/1/80*



BA#47 G.S.V.H.D.  
Come By Chance  
Spring House  
fr. S.  
L. Eaton 2/79  
Md. Hist Trust